

# A Modern Cinderella

BY  
ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

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It was the beginning of September and frightfully hot. The girls, in faded muslins and much-mended blouses of imitation lace, who had been mourning the fact that they could afford nothing new until they got an engagement, now lifted up their curled heads and rejoiced. Those who had bravely invested their all in "new fall suits" in which to impress the managers, dragged themselves along the line, with smiling, scarlet faces, half-suffocated by the heat, but deathlessly proud of their unseasonable finery.

The Hopeful Girl from the Provinces walked very quickly up the Rialto—at least, as quickly as she could. The crowds of hungry-looking actors ranged about every street corner discouraged locomotion at times. She felt nervous and alone. It was one thing to consider seriously in her own country bedroom the trials of stage life, quite another to live them. She had said to herself:

"It isn't as though I didn't know just what I am going into—the drudgery and discouragement and difficulty. Haven't I read of that in every interview with every actress, and every article by every playwright, for the last five years? Of course I know, and I shall be quite content with a maid's part—which Miss Morris says is the test of real dramatic ambition." (She wouldn't have said "Clara Morris" for the world. The "Miss" seemed more intimate, somehow.)

Poor little Hopeful Girl! She did not any longer talk parrot-wise of the thorny path of the ambitious. She had been to eight managers' offices. Three of the managers had declined to be interviewed. Three more had laughed at her, and said that they had no room for beginners. The other two had told her briefly to call in every week; they might place her in a chorus or among the extras, later on. The humble vision of her maid's part had grown to look as big as Juliet or Magda, and just about as attainable.

The Hopeful Girl looked anxiously at the street numbers as she walked on. New York was still new to her, and she did not want to pass her next goal—the office of a dramatic agent who had told her to look in about four-thirty each afternoon.

When she reached the office entrance—it was in a big theatre building—she felt a little breathless and dizzy from the heat. She had to wait a minute before climbing the stairway, leaning against the side of the door, rather white and limp.

"Do anything for you?" asked a bluff comedy man in a plaid suit.

She shook her head.

An electric hansom stopped at the door and a pretty, rouged woman in a feather boa that smelled of violets sprang out. Her face was anxious and eager; she pulled nervously at her gloves as she came in. She turned her big, dark eyes on the Girl with a sort of babyish, startled stare.

"Hi!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I'm so sorry!" She passed hastily on. The Girl felt a little quiver run through her. The woman was Miss Masters, John Cannister's leading woman.

"How lovely she is!" murmured the Girl, as she slowly and rather dizzily mounted the two flights that led up to Cornwall Summers' office. The little waiting-room was full of people, men and women. A buzz of conversation was going on—it reminded the Hopeful Girl of afternoon tea in Monkton, Massachusetts. The sweet-faced, gray-haired woman who sat near the window writing in a big book and opening letters looked up and smiled at the Girl as she came in. Two men made way for her to pass, and she crossed the room and stood wearily by the gray-haired woman's desk. There was no chair left unoccupied in the room.

"It's hot, isn't it?" said the woman.

"Oh, yes," answered the Girl, hastily, grateful for the meeting.

"You're lucky not to be rehearsing," said the gray-haired woman, comfortingly. She was the type of woman whose only idea of condoling is to congratulate you on your escape from worse ills.

A woman who sat near laughed sarcastically. "Great luck!" she remarked, dryly. "Oh, yes! Gee, yes! We're all just getting down on our knees, thanking Providence we're not rehearsing! Who'd rehearse this weather, anyhow? Only, I know—she drawled this out in a languid fashion—"I'm so beastly afraid the managers won't let me rest comfortably! They just pester me to death!"

There was a general laugh at this, and the gray-haired woman smiled indulgently. "You're a cheerful girl, Lil," she said. "It always does me good to see you. Nothing seems to down you."

"Oh, well, say! What's the use?" said Lil.

She was very pretty, very thin, and much made-up; her soft, abundant hair was dressed exaggeratedly; her clothes were becoming, but in bad taste.

"If that isn't Jimmie Sears!" she cried, suddenly, springing up. "We were in 'The Sins of the Fathers' together. Well, Jimmie-boy! so you're still on deck!"

She crossed the little room to shake a tall young man by both hands. He was good-looking, clean-shaven and painfully thin.

"Lil!" he exclaimed, heartily. "Well, this is good luck! What are you doing?"

"Oh, say!" she expostulated, "what am I doing! Will you hear the boy? Why, Jimmie, darling, I'm running a yacht—no, I'm living in Newport—no, I'm playing an eight months' run with Belasco!" and she burst out laughing. "Say, you blessed idiot, what do you think I am doing sitting here, as I am, in dear Cornwall's diggings, kicking holes in my shoes?"

"I infer," remarked the tall young man, "that you're out of a job."

"No!" she exclaimed. "Jimmie, don't tell me you've ever jumped to that conclusion all by your little lone self? Bless him!"

The door of the inner office opened, and every one fell suddenly silent. The pretty woman with the boa came out, still nervously pulling her gloves. She

"Well, I suppose you're going on up the line?" said Jimmie.

"Well, rather!" returned Lil. "You never know what may turn up. Bird got a great job the other day—three lines and ten a week—just by going every day to Legger's, sitting there for two hours with the push, and keeping her eyes and ears open! Well, so long, everybody!" and she departed gaily.

The Hopeful Girl felt a queer quiver in her heart. "Three lines and ten a week." This was a "great job!" Surely this world was not the dramatic world of her dreams. She went blindly out of the little room and down the stairs. Her thin skirts seemed heavy to her, and once or twice she nearly fell. She couldn't imagine why she felt so ill, and queer. She

"Why, where am I?" she asked.

"In Kelly's saloon," answered Jimmie, cheerfully. "Best little joint on the line—decent stuff, and two drinks for a quarter; a sandwich thrown in. Say—what's the matter?" For the Girl was trying to rise. "A saloon!" she gasped. "Oh, I didn't know! I mustn't stay!"

"Look here," said Jimmie, gently, "it's none of my business, but don't you think I look decent enough to take care of you? You're not fit to walk yet a bit. I never could see that a saloon was worse than any other place. 'Tisn't a place that counts, it's what you do in it."

"But—but—" whispered the Girl, "I've been—drinking!"

The Girl hesitated but a moment, then the strangeness of things generally, combined with her hunger, overcame her.

"I—I don't mind!" she said, faintly.

The meal was ordered, and the two began to talk like old friends. They studied each other. Jimmie's eyes softened as they rested on the light tendrils of hair floating around the Girl's delicate little pale face. She was not pretty, but she was dainty and fresh, and would make a corking ingenue, he decided.

"What's your name?" he asked, with comfortable frankness, after a bite.

"Mouse—I mean Musetta Mallinger."

"Mouse!" he laughed gaily. "That's ever so much nicer than Musetta. So they call you Mouse?" She nodded, smiling shyly.

"I never saw why!" she volunteered.

"Oh, ye gods! Didn't you? Why, because you're little, and soft, and gentle, and—and—" his voice dropped a little—"sweet." Jimmie had a way with women, for all his boyishness and lankiness.

"But I've quite a bad temper," said Mouse, seriously. "Well, I dare say some mice have!" he retorted, with another ringing laugh. "I can just see you as a little mouse, slipping out in the candle-light and nibbling at the bread and cheese, or—"

"Oh, don't!" cried Mouse, with a breaking voice. "Don't! It's just what I used to do—at home!"

"Child—child!" he said, very low. "I didn't—oh, I didn't mean to hurt you. Are you so homesick?"

"Only just now and then," said Mouse, gulping gallantly.

"Why don't you go back?" asked Jimmie, gravely. "Because—because—I said I wouldn't," said Mouse.

"I quarreled with—with my stepmother, and—I said I'd not go back, and I won't."

"What a brave little mouse it is," said the man, softly, "all by itself in a world of hungry cats!"

He was silent a moment; then he said: "What made you choose the stage?"

Mouse hesitated, then she spoke, very low and quickly.

"All my life I've wanted to be near something that was bright and beautiful. We lived in an ugly house in an ugly village, and the very days were ugly, too. My happiest time was when I crept down at midnight to nibble things that I found in the pantry and ice-box, and dream over what was left of the fire. It seemed to me sometimes as though I must run away to where there was some beauty. Don't you know what I mean? I was starved for just colors and sounds and things like that. I—I can't explain." She fell silent.

"I think I understand," said the man, very gently. "Poor little Mouse!"

"And by degrees," she went on, "I grew to think that in the theatre I could find what I wanted. Oh, not to be a great actress—just part of the whole; but in a place where there were lights, and pretty dresses, and something besides horsehair and saffron wallpaper. So when the break came—I—I chose—the stage."

"Poor, poor little Mouse!" said the man, again. "It's like Cinderella."

"Only," said the Hopeful Girl, with a little smile, attacking her tough roast beef, "I'm going to no ball. I—I've no glass slippers to leave behind me, that the Prince may know me again."

"Who knows?" said Jimmie Sears, softly. "Some glass slippers are hard to see. And there are all kinds of balls."

When they had finished their meal, they went out gaily together. It was after five, too late to go to any other managers or agents, and they parted at the street corner, saying good-by rather sadly, not being old enough to know how small the world really is.

Now it so happened that the very next morning Mouse Mallinger got an engagement. It was only to walk on as an extra, but it sufficed to paint streaks of pink in her pathway. But the rose-color was not all enfolding, however. She was wishing there were still such things as glass slippers by which one might come to one's own again.

In the wings that night, waiting for her first entrance, Mouse felt frightened and alone. She was arrayed in an Oriental dress, and her make-up put on by the wardrobe woman had rendered her unrecognizable, even to her own eyes, in the cracked mirror in the general dressing-room. The shadows and lights and minor music confused her brain. A tall man near her leaned wearily against a pile of scenery. He was made up swarthy, and his strange silken garments hid all the lines of his figure.

"Group there at the side, you new extras," called the stage manager in a hoarse whisper. And Mouse and the tall man found themselves shoulder to shoulder at the entrance. She looked up, and he down, and a light as bright as steel flashed between their eyes. The swarthy man smiled eagerly, and the little Oriental woman felt her eyes fill up with glad tears.

"Cinderella!" he whispered, touching her.

"But I haven't any glass slippers," she said whimsically.

"You didn't need any glass slippers," he breathed in her ear. "I'd know you in wooden shoes!" And then they went on to the rose-lighted stage, where soft, strange music played and people were dancing.

But it was only the beginning of the old, old Fairy Tale that ever seems so new.



SHE TURNED HER BIG, DARK EYES ON THE GIRL WITH A STARTLED STARE.

looked more anxious than ever.

"You'll not fail to let me know," she said, over her shoulder, and passed hurriedly out.

"Think of Margot Masters looking for a job!" murmured Lil. "Oh, I say, you know, it is a rotten season!"

Cornwall Summers stood for a moment at the inner door. He was a man of medium height, in a gray alpaca smoking-jacket. His face was clean-shaven and kindly, as well as shrewd. He looked quickly about the room and addressed people here and there.

"Back from the road, Miss Carter? Very well. Drop in to-morrow. Nothing to-day, Miss Parsons. No, Mr. Jackson, I told you I had nothing in your line. What can I do for you, sir? Go and fill in one of Miss Ryter's blanks if you want an engagement. Let us see—no—no—nothing for any of the rest of you."

The Hopeful Girl summoned up courage to approach him.

"Is there no chance for anything?" she faltered. "I—I—don't mean a part, of course," she hastened to add, humbly—"just extra work, you know, or—"

"Sorry," said the agent, briefly. "All the big shows are filled. It's late, you know." Then he added, kindly: "It's a pity. You know—and he dropped his voice a little—"I often wish I could get you all fixed for the winter—apart from the business, I mean. You worry me, the lot of you!" He retired into his office and banged the door.

"Nothing doing!" said Lil, cheerfully, and plumed herself in front of a dingy mirror, preparatory to taking up her journey once more.

"Nothing doing!" echoed Jimmie, ruefully, but with a grin. "Good old chap, Cornwall, all the same. Best of his brand going."

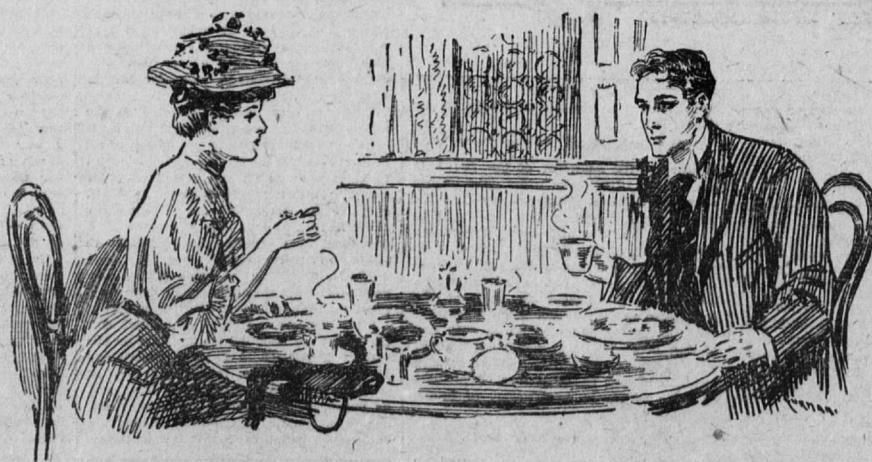
"Nothing—nothing—nothing doing!" chuckled a grim imp in the ear of the Hopeful Girl. She pushed back her hair with a weary gesture, and wiped her damp cheek with her small handkerchief.

had quite forgotten that she had eaten nothing since the night before, and had only had a very bad cup of coffee. When she reached the entrance again she felt unaccountably dizzy, and stopped, breathless. The street seemed to swim in hot dusty sunlight, blotched with rapid clouds of dark . . .

"That's all right," said Jimmie Sears. "You'll be better in a minute. Hang on to me hard, and we'll go and chase a drink. Beastly work this job-hunting."

Jimmie's gray eyes twinkled as they rested for a moment on the half emptied little glass on the polished table before them.

"A lot you have!" he said. "Young lady, you've got to finish that and have a sandwich on me before I let you out of my sight. Why, I thought you were gone for sure, when I came upon you at the foot of those stairs. How does a roast-beef sandwich strike you this warm afternoon?"



WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THE STAGE?

The Girl did not know at all how she happened to be clinging to Jimmie's arm, and walking slowly down the street. A step or two sufficed to bring them to the side door of a saloon, into which Jimmie led her. Then she quite fainted for a second in a chair in the dark, musty-smelling room, leaning against Jimmie. Something hot-tasting went down her throat and she choked and looked up, suddenly revived and quite bewildered.

The Girl's eyes suddenly glistened with primitive greed. Jimmie's heart contracted in a queer way. Why, the child was hungry! He felt hotly indignant. Then he investigated his pocket surreptitiously, and essayed a tactful proposition.

"I don't know that a sandwich'd be much good," he remarked. "For my part, I want a meal! What do you say to—to—hot roast beef and potato salad, with coffee, and bread?"

## Next Week, "When Both Masks Fell,"

BY  
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